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AUTHOR Jackson, John H.
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ABSTRACT

The model of psychological services delivery to be practiced can ensure that the indispensability of psychological services is clearly perceived. This is particularly true for learners and the learning process in urban schools. However, the strategy of developing a model of services delivery as a means of guaranteeing the positions of psychologists carries its own seed of destruction. First, it alters and devalues the role and functions of the psychologist in the schools. Second, some of the functions previously considered essential to the role may be taken over by others. Third, demoralization of the psychological services staff results. Fourth, the institution may realize it is paying for expensive personnel it does not need. Fifth, the position of the psychologist may be eliminated or severely limited. The case for recognizing that urban, institutional school psychology is truly indispensable is: (1) to practice psychology is the only legitimate reason for the psychologist to be in the school; (2) to devise administrative plans that implement a basic decision to remain a psychological services provider instead of becoming a general utility worker; (3) to develop a fully functioning service delivery program; (4) to expand legitimate psychological services as needed and possible, and (5) to improve lines of communication with the school. (JBJ)

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Chapter Nine

Psychology in Schools *Is* Indispensable: An Administrative Perspective

John H. Jackson

Make psychology in schools indispensable? Psychology in schools *is* indispensable! What is needed is to help the schools to see that this is truly the case. This rather personal paper, distilled from years of service delivery in the schools, provides an administrative perspective of how schools may be helped to see the indispensability of psychology in the schools.

Making the right administrative decision about the model of psychological services delivery to be practiced can ensure that the indispensability of psychological services is clearly perceived. This is particularly true for learners and the learning process in the urban school or urban school system. Promulgating the wrong model can be all but a guarantee of the demise of these indispensable services. It all depends on two alternatives:

1. Will the model adhere closely to the basic knowledge and service functions of the specialty? and
2. Will the model accommodate performance of a broad array of functions and activities not really germane to psychology? The right decision may not be consistent with the advice sometimes given to graduates eager to be viewed by administrators as generally useful, the advice to "do whatever is necessary to ingratiate yourself with the principal."

The Case for Dispensibility or Demise of Services

Many factors can impact administrative decision-making within the urban school. The model for psychological services delivery in urban schools is impacted by these same factors. These include tough times or periods of economic retrenchment, the needs of quasi-administrators or other functionaries for the many duties to be performed in urban school buildings, and the overwhelming drive by some school program administrators to "build empires" by expanding the areas of their responsibilities. There also may be the personal desire to ingratiate oneself with other building authorities.

Any one of these factors or combination of factors may become the reason for the psychological services unit to take on one additional function or activity after another. During periods of economic retrenchment, cutbacks or downsizing of staffs is common. On a daily basis, job loss is threatened. Competition among specialties, professions, and program personnel intensifies. Each takes on responsibilities. The end purpose of these frenetic

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efforts is that of appearing to be extremely useful and, therefore, indispensable to the administration. The remainder of this discussion will focus on the current climate of cutbacks and economic retrenchment.

Under conditions of cutbacks, building administrators are given to believe that the list of services the psychologist appropriately can deliver is practically endless. Not only can the psychologist assess, counsel, and consult regarding psychological problems, the administrator is reassured that the psychologist also can coordinate building referrals, chair the multidisciplinary team staffings, prepare team reports in addition to his or her own report, notify parents of team meetings, chair the prereferral team meetings and prepare recommendations to the school staff, go into classrooms and demonstrate teaching techniques, assist with getting students on and off the yellow buses, help to discipline students, monitor the lunch room, perform playground duties, etc. This type of elasticity of functioning easily can be the outcome when the position description of the psychologist is vague. Also, it can occur in the urban school since there are many different jobs to be performed and to be combined or reassigned during tough times.

Experience tells us that difficulty soon enters the picture from multiple directions. The psychologist quickly finds it tiresome to perform a range of functions for which he or she has not trained and in which he or she has little or no real interest. The psychologist begins to complain that the job pressures to serve increasing numbers of school clients in increasing numbers of roles reduce the quality of service. Work taken home overnight, over the weekend, and over holidays can become regular. The job may be there, but job satisfaction has disappeared.

In schools undergoing staff cutbacks, there is the realization among psychological services staff that although the jobs are there for the moment, insecurity also abounds. The threat of continued staff reductions is ever present. Some legitimate functions of the psychologist in the schools may be taken up by non-psychologists, e.g., some of the testing. In some cases, private practice psychologists may see referred students at the school. In this context, the psychologist in the school can experience considerable anger and depression, accompanied by some feelings of betrayal by the institution.

The institution also may come to moments of realization. There may be the realization that many of the jobs the psychologist has taken over can be performed by less highly trained and less highly paid personnel, perhaps even someone from the paraprofessional level. If this is the case, why keep a highly paid staff member when a less expensive staff person can do the same job, maybe even with greater dedication? At the same time, some of the functions previously performed only by the psychologist have been taken over by other personnel. What then is there left for the psychologist to do in the schools?

In spite of the above scenario, there is much still left in the schools for the psychologist to do. However, the building administrator may not see the possibilities. The only thing clearly perceived may be that the psychologist is no longer needed. As indicated above, the superintendent or school board might move first to cut back on psychological services supervisors, since the changed perception of the role of the psychologist no longer requires specialty supervision. The position of psychologist may be the next slated for cutback.

In summary, the strategy of developing a model of psychological services delivery as a means of guaranteeing the positions of psychologists carries its own seed of destruction. First, it alters and devalues the role and functions of the psychologist in the schools. Second, some of the functions previously considered essential to the role may be taken over by others. Third, demoralization of the psychological services staff

results. Fourth, the institution may realize it is paying for expensive personnel it does not need. Fifth, the position of psychologist may be eliminated or, at best, severely limited.

Helping Schools Recognize the Psychologist's Indispensability

It is unnerving to forego the process of taking on one extra function after another when it appears as if everyone else is doing just this to keep his or her job. This is especially true when positions in all professions hosted by the schools, including one's own, are being reduced and eliminated. This is the reality in which psychologists, among others, in school systems across the country currently find themselves.

The rationale for the psychologist to be in the schools is that he or she is performing highly specialized and professional services that no one else in that setting has the training, skills, and certification to provide. The greatest contribution that the psychologist can make is to provide those unique services that are within his or her scope of competence. This is the raison d'etre for the psychologist in the school.

In my opinion, it is fraudulent for the psychologist to be in the schools for any reason other than school psychological services delivery. If not there as a psychologist, there is no professional, educational, or economic basis of the psychologist to be in the school. The psychologist is not in the schools as the administrator of educational programs, a subject area teacher, a social worker, or security aide; nor should she or he attempt to fill such roles. To even try to fill such roles in some schools may be the cause of considerable reactive labor union protests, for example, on behalf of teachers. In other instances, certification guidelines may prevent state reimbursement for psychologists who function outside their specialty area. Liability insurance may not provide coverage for functioning out of the recognized specialty area.

When the stance is taken to stay squarely within the bounds of psychological practice in the face of apparent inducements within the general school context to do otherwise, several operational decisions, in effect, are made. The basic decision is to provide services to the fullest feasible extent. This calls for a renewed dedication to services delivery in the overall program and in individual cases. Timeliness of service delivery is likely to take on added meaning. Case thoroughness and care may gain new emphasis. Follow through and follow up are apt to become consistent. In other words, an extra measure is added. The overall program may seem to have more visibility. Of central importance is the success of services delivered—that is, real help to referred students, teachers, and parents. There is less room for nonproductive periods of time.

The first corollary decision to the previously discussed basic decision is to expand legitimate psychological services where feasible. Where previously little or no therapeutic counseling has been provided, a limited amount may be added. Group intervention or therapeutic counseling with students about whom the building administration has major concerns also may be added. Where psychological consultation has been limited to individual cases, consideration might be given to consultation with the faculty on topics of child behavior that the faculty has indicated to be challenging. Unnecessary assessment or evaluation may be avoided. Program consultation may be accentuated, especially school-wide or system-wide programs, or perhaps parental advisement programs. Innovations considered should serve well the greatest number of persons.

The second corollary decision to the basic decision is to improve communication with the school. The general purpose of such improved communication is to encourage others to team with the psychologist in serving children and to make certain that everyone understands fully the contributions that psychology is making to the

school—how the psychologist functions to support the learning-citizenship-personal development programs and why the functions are essential to those programs.

In the end, the principal needs to see that his or her concerns regarding overall school goals are being addressed. The teachers need to believe that they have received real and practical help with referred students regarding a variety of problems and learning activities. The staff, especially in small schools, is always watching (even when we think they are not) and they need to see improved student behavior at the interface of their own interactions with the students. The students, too, need to know they have a caring friend in "that lady" or "that man" "who comes around to help us." The perception of the psychologist in the school by each constituency in the school should be "there is a real source of (psychological) help."

This, then, is the case for recognizing that urban, institutional school psychology is truly indispensable:

1. taking the position that the practice of psychology in the school is the only legitimate reason for the psychologist to be in the school,
2. devising administrative plans for psychological services delivery that implement a basic decision to remain a psychological services provider instead of becoming a general utility worker on the edge of the profession of psychology,
3. developing operational decisions that lead to a fully functioning service delivery program,
4. expanding legitimate psychological services as needed and possible, and
5. improving lines of communication with the school so that all may feel a part of the process of helping and knowing the specific good that has been accomplished.